

GM-FREE IRELAND, 11 APRIL 2011

## IRISH CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON GM CROPS

- **GMO is "biggest threat" to island's farmers**
- **Scientists accuse European Food Safety Authority of corruption and fraud**
- **Doctors invoke the Precautionary Principle**
- **Consumers want GM-free Irish label to support responsible farmers**



This media release can be downloaded at [www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI53.pdf](http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI53.pdf)

DUBLIN — The Irish government and the Northern Irish Assembly must implement a five-year moratorium on field trials and cultivation of GM crops on the island of Ireland, with immediate effect.<sup>1</sup>

Representatives of farm, food, health and environmental bodies from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Wales agreed the demand at the *Gathering Momentum: Stop GM!* community discussion<sup>2</sup> hosted by the Dublin Food Coop<sup>3</sup> yesterday.

Participants called for the moratorium on GM crops to protect our health, to safeguard our environment, and a voluntary GM-free label<sup>4</sup> to enable farmers and food producers on both sides of the Border to compete in the Non-GMO quality food market that is rapidly spreading across Europe, Asia and the USA.<sup>5</sup>

Irish beef and dairy produce (our two biggest farm exports) benefit from the clean green image of *Ireland – the food island*. Although no GM crops have ever been released for cultivation on the island, farmers in the Republic bought more than 7.5 million tones of imported GM soy and GM maize animal feed in 2008 – 2010<sup>6</sup>. Animal produce from livestock fed on these GM feedstuffs is increasingly excluded by leading brands and retailers in the EU and the USA.<sup>7</sup>

### Government slammed for mixed messages

Ireland's previous Fianna Fáil / Green coalition government agreed to ban field trials and cultivation of GM crops, and also promised to introduce a voluntary GM-free label which farmers and food exporters need to gain market share<sup>8</sup>. But due to intense lobbying by the US Government<sup>9</sup> and the global pesticide and the animal feed cartels, it failed to implement the policy agreement with any legislation. Two weeks before leaving office, FF's outgoing Agriculture Minister Brendan Smith voted to weaken the EU's GM safety rules and claimed that Ireland would now vote in favour of new GM approvals<sup>10</sup> at EU level — without a mandate from the Irish people or the new government that followed.<sup>11</sup>

Farmers and consumers are extremely concerned that the new Fine Gael / Labour government might allow patented GM crops to be grown in the Republic for the first time. Although this government has made no public declaration, contradictory pre-election statements<sup>12</sup> by the coalition partners reveal ignorance and confusion.<sup>13</sup> Fine Gael's Michael Creed TD, Lucinda Creighton TD, Mairéad McGuinness MEP, and Jim Higgins MEP all promote GM food and farming<sup>14</sup>. Teagasc got €10 million for GM crop research and now wants to experiment with field trials of GMO potatoes.<sup>15</sup>

### Biggest threat to farming future

Addressing the meeting on Sunday, Tipperary farmer Richard Auler said "The proposed introduction of GM crops by the new government is now the single biggest threat to the future of farming on this island. It would destroy all of our competitive advantages — including the least polluted topsoil in Europe, our mostly grass-based production system, and our famous clean green image." The Irish Cattle and Sheepfarmers Association also favours a ban on GM crops<sup>16</sup>. Paolo di Crocia, from Slow Food International<sup>17</sup>, said "Since we live in a global world, stopping the march of GM seeds and crops is not only very important for Ireland, but also for the developing world, where food security is paramount."

### Denial of science by the European Food Safety Authority

Also speaking at the gathering was Dr. Brian John, from GM-free Cymru<sup>18</sup> (Wales), who said "the European Food Safety Authority's litany of positive opinions on the safety of GM feed and food is a grotesque travesty of science.<sup>19</sup> Independent, peer-reviewed scientific research<sup>20</sup> clearly demonstrates that GM crops damage human and animal health as well as the environment. We have therefore reached a crucial point in the GM debate: the claim that GM benefits the planet is not just invalid, but the whole GM case is no longer even arguable." Dr. John recently persuaded MEPs to call for EFSA's GMO Panel to be investigated for its pro-GM bias and revolving door with the industry it is entrusted to regulate.<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Elizabeth Cullen from the Irish Doctors Environmental Association<sup>22</sup> said "GM is one big uncontrolled experiment. The risk assessments from short-term feeding trials which the pesticide companies provide to the European Food Safety Authority are always favourable. But research by independent scientists now provides sufficient evidence of unacceptable harm to human health and to our ecosystem, that Europe must apply the Precautionary Principle and apply a moratorium on GM food and farming."

### Ireland's GM crop-free status: a unique selling point for live cattle and food exports

Michael O'Callaghan of GM-free Ireland is advising farmers, food producers, chefs, tourism operators and consumers to take urgent action to prevent Fine Gael's GM industry lobbyists from irrevocably destroying our reputation as *Ireland – the food island*. Darina Allen, the celebrity chef and President of Slow Food Ireland<sup>23</sup> said "I am asking all concerned to please take up your pens and phones, get on to your local press and radio, and contact your TDs and MEPs to convey your concerns about GM food. For more information, go to the GM Free Ireland and the Slow Food Ireland websites, and mention the ten reasons<sup>24</sup> for your concern about the harm from GMOs."

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## NOTES FOR EDITORS

<sup>1</sup> Cultivation of GM crops is banned by 8 EU member states, 51 EU Regions and thousands of local areas. For details see: <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org>

Neighbouring EU Regions closest to Ireland (Scotland, Wales and Brittany) + 40 English counties are strongly opposed to GM crops. Switzerland has extended its previous 5-year moratorium to 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The community discussion was a joint venture organised by Food Action and the GM-free Ireland Network (whose 130 organisational members — and the populations of the 9 Irish counties and 9 city or town councils which oppose the cultivation of GM crops — represent over 1 million citizens.

<sup>3</sup> Dublin Food Coop is Ireland's leading member-owned co-operative, which recently voted to exclude any food containing GM ingredients: <http://www.dublinfood.coop>

<sup>4</sup> See the European GMO-free Regions Network Declaration on Labels and GM-free Farming, 5 February 2010: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/EU-GMO-Free-Regions-Declaration-5March2010.pdf>

This was one of the outcomes of the *Third Conference on Non-GM Labels, Quality Productions and European Regional Agricultures' Strategy hosted by the EU Committee of the Regions* in collaboration with the Association of European Regions for Products of Origin (AREPO), and many other stakeholders. See related GM-free Ireland press release: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/feed/documents/GMFI-GM-free-Soya-conf.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See "GM-free Production: A Unique Selling Point for Ireland – the Food Island: 47-page briefing with GM-free market survey, 17 Nov. 2009 (1.2MB pdf): <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/GMFI-briefing-3.pdf>

See video of related GM-free Ireland press conference: <http://vimeo.com/7981730>

For information about the market for GM-free food in the USA, see: <http://www.nongmoproject.org>

<sup>6</sup> See "Ireland's Imports of Animal Feed Commodities That Could Be GM from 2008 to 2010:" <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/feed/irish-imports/IRL-GM-feed-imports-2008-2010.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> GM-free Irish label good for business: Added value, increased market share, better branding and unique selling point: the most credible GM-free food brand in Europe. GM-free Ireland Network press release, 17 November 2009: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI46.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Programme for Fianna Fáil / Green Government, June 2007:

"The Government will seek to negotiate the establishment of an all-Ireland GMO-free [crop] zone."

Revised Programme for Fianna Fáil / Green Government, October 2009:

[The Government will] "declare the Republic of Ireland a GM-Free Zone, free from the cultivation of all GM plants... To optimize Ireland's competitive advantage as a GM-free country, we will introduce a voluntary GM-free logo for use in all relevant product labelling and advertising, similar to a scheme recently introduced in Germany."

<sup>9</sup> Biotech Diplomacy: How US Embassies Are Pushing GMOs Throughout Europe: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/14988316/Biotech-Diplomacy-How-US-Embassies-Are-Pushing-GMOs-Throughout-Europe>

<sup>10</sup> Brendan Smith's press release: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/press/pressreleases/2011/february/title,51105,en.html>

<sup>11</sup> The outgoing minister made no reference to the policy to keep Ireland off-limits to GM crops.

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<sup>12</sup> Contradictory Fine Gael and Labour Party political party statements prior to the 2011 election:

Ruairi Quinn TD, Labour Party spokesperson for Science, GM-free Ireland press conference, 21 February 2011:

"The Labour Party does not want to see GM food or seed introduced to the Irish agricultural system. GM-free is a status that has competitive advantage at the present time... Therefore the Labour party is opposed to changing the present status."

Sean Sherlock, TD, Labour Party spokesperson for Agriculture (quoted by Dermot Lacey on behalf of Eamon Gilmore), 24 February 2011:

"We are awaiting draft legislation to come from Europe on this area. We are committed to engaging with all the relevant interest groups and stakeholders as soon as it is published but feels it would be inappropriate to comment before that happens."

Michael Creed TD, Fine Gael spokesperson on agriculture and European Affairs:

"Whether we like it or not we have to face up to the reality of GM foods sooner rather than later. We are living in a time where populations are swelling and global climate changes are having an adverse affect on crop yields. Drought is prevalent and with the advent of biofuels prices of various different crops are becoming unsustainable. Food security is going to be a massive issue in the future and it would be remiss of us as a country not to debate and probe the issues now."

"Last year agriculture took a €160 million hit due to the EU Commission dragging its heels in permitting the usage of certain GM products in the production of Animal Feeds. All the while the EU was importing animals from other regions that are being fed on the very same products that the EU was banning here. This situation serves nobody, neither the farmer, who is losing financially, nor the consumer, who is being misled."

<sup>13</sup> New programme for Government agreed by Fine Gael and Labour, March 2011:

- No mention of GM food and farming issues.
- No mention of previous policy for national ban on GM crops.
- No mention of regulations for the proposed voluntary GM-free label.
- Incompatible paradigms — industrial agri-business and sustainable agriculture don't mix:
- "We will prioritise a Single Farm Payment system which best benefits active Irish farmers and *the Irish grass based system* of production."
- "We will develop a single brand for the Irish agri-food sector globally. Bord Bia will also work in cooperation with producers and small businesses to develop *value-added Irish food brands, such an eco brand, and local brands*".
- "Further expansion and innovation in our dairy and meat sectors will be a key priority under a reformed CAP and *we will work with industry to achieve more intensive levels of production.*"

<sup>14</sup> Fine Gael TDs and MEPs who are known to lobby for GM food and farming:

Jim Higgins MEP, 15 march 2011:

GM feed could solve pig sector problems

<http://www.jimhiggins.ie/ep/news/2011/308-gm-feed-could-solve-pig-sector-problems--jim-higgins-mep>

The statement reveals Higgins' ignorance of facts and denial of science:

- Rising feed costs are not caused by lack of GM feed in Ireland. We imported 5.7 million tones of it from 2008-2011!
- no GM crops currently on the market are designed for higher yields;
- numerous studies confirm farmers experience that GM crops have lower yields;
- there is plenty of scientific evidence of harm from GM crops and food in in countries where they are grown;
- the only GM fodder crop authorized for cultivation in the EU, Monsanto's Mon810 maize, is unsuitable for cultivation in Ireland, being designed to produce a toxic pesticide against the European Corn Borer which does not exist here.

According to the Tuam Herald of 7 April 2011, "Mr. Higgins said GM crops grown solely for animal feed could be part of the solution for Irish [pig] producers in Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and Longford." This displays his ignorance of farming, since GM maize is unsuitable for cultivation in Ireland, and the imported GM soy widely used to feed pigs in Irish factory farms is not approved for cultivation in the EU!

Lucinda Creighton TD, statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Scrutiny, 16 February 2008:

<http://www.gmfrireland.org/government/oireachtas/EUScrutiny26feb2008.pdf>

"We all know how important GMOs are to the agricultural industry and particularly to foodstuffs. That has not changed, cannot change and will not change under this or any future Administration in practice despite what may be put forward in theory... There is a clear case being advocated at all levels, including United Nations level, on the absolute need for GM foods in tackling such problems as world poverty and world hunger... It is too late to put that genie back in the bottle... It is clear that it is not possible to reverse and roll back from where we are in respect of GM feedstuffs... there are food shortages within the Union that will increase in number unless we enhance productivity and output. The only way to do this while competing on global

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markets is through the acceleration and improvement of the role of GM foods in the agriculture sector in this country.”

Despite Ms. Creighton’s claim about the “clear case being advocated at all levels, including United Nations level, on the absolute need for GM foods in tackling such problems as world poverty and world hunger”, the most authoritative study ever produced on the issue – the United Nations / World Bank report “Agriculture at a Crossroads” published by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development in 2008 comes to the exact opposite conclusion: GM crops have little, if any role, to play in meeting the food needs of humankind’s expanding population! The IAASTD report is available at <http://www.agassessment.org>

Mairéad McGuinness MEP, co-signed an amendment to a draft 2006 European Parliament resolution initiated by the Finnish MEP Kyösti Virrankoski calling for the EU to approve the cultivation of GM pharma crops which could contaminate the food chain with industrial chemicals, agrofuels and drugs including blood thinners, blood clotters and contraceptives. The Parliament rejected the resolution. See: <http://www.gmfrireland.org/politics/EUbiotech.php>

<sup>15</sup> Teagasc has spent millions of Euro of taxpayer funds for GM crop research, including an attempt to develop a GM blight-resistant potato — even though three natural varieties of blight-resistant spuds already exist, and there is absolutely no market for GM food in Europe!

<sup>16</sup> ICSA Executive Researcher Gillian Westbrook:

“Regardless of the scientific arguments for or against GM, Ireland needs to be open to the potential of a voluntary GM-free label to gain access to those niche markets wanting high-value foods.”

GM-free Ireland press conference, 21 February 2011:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2COUI4vnP4&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2COUI4vnP4&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>17</sup> Slow Food International is a global, grassroots organization promoting good, clean and fair food for all. It has over 100,000 members in 150 countries around the world: <http://www.slowfood.com>

<sup>18</sup> GM-free Cymru (Wales): <http://www.gmfrecymru.org>

<sup>19</sup> See “Commission denial of evidence of harm from GM crops and foods”, Open letter to John Dalli, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs, from Dr. Brian John, 10 September 2010:  
[http://www.gmfrecymru.org/open\\_letters/Open\\_letter10Sept2010.html](http://www.gmfrecymru.org/open_letters/Open_letter10Sept2010.html)

See also “The GM science community is its own worse enemy”, open letter to Sir Paul Nurse, President of the (UK) Royal Society, from Dr. Brian John, 26 January 2011:  
[http://www.gmfrecymru.org/open\\_letters/Open\\_letter26Jan2011.html](http://www.gmfrecymru.org/open_letters/Open_letter26Jan2011.html)

<sup>20</sup> For scientific papers on the harm caused by GM feed, GM food and GM crops, see for example:

- Genetically modified crops safety assessments: present limits and possible improvements. Environmental Sciences Europe, 1 March 2011. doi:10.1186/2190-4715-23-10. <http://www.enveurope.com/content/23/1/10>
- Agrochemicals found in mothers' milk in soy producing area of Brazil. GM Watch review of scientific findings, 8 April 2011: <http://gmwatch.org/latest-listing/1-news-items/13039-agrochemicals-found-in-mothers-milk-in-soy-producing-area-of-brazil>
- GM Crops – Just the Science: research documenting the limitations, risks and alternatives: <http://www.nongmoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/GM-Crops-just-the-science.pdf>
- GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible? A summary of scientific evidence showing that genetically modified (GM) soy and the glyphosate herbicide it is engineered to tolerate are unsustainable from the point of view of farming, the environment, rural communities, animal and human health, and economies. By Michael Antoniou, Paulo Brack, Andrés Carrasco, John Fagan, Mohamed Habib, Paulo Kageyama, Carlo Leifert, Rubens Onofre Nodari, Walter Pengue. September 2010: <http://www.gmwatch.eu/reports/12479-reports-reports>
- Pivotal papers recommended by GM-free Cymru: <http://www.gmfrecymru.org/pivotal.htm>
- Testbiotech Institute reports and publications: <http://www.testbiotech.org/en/leseraum>
- Committee for Research and Independent Information on Genetic Engineering: <http://www.criigen.org/SiteEn/>

<sup>21</sup> Anti-GM scientist wins probe into food safety: [http://www.gmfrecymru.org/news/Press\\_Notice22Mar2011.htm](http://www.gmfrecymru.org/news/Press_Notice22Mar2011.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Irish Doctors Environmental Association: <http://www.ideaireland.org>

<sup>23</sup> Slow Food Ireland: <http://www.slowfoodireland.com>

<sup>24</sup> Ten reasons for concern about GM food: <http://www.gmwatch.org/10-reasons-why-we-dont-need-gm-foods>